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Academic Labour, Journal Ranking Lists and the Politics of Knowledge Production in Marketing¹

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Abstract

In this paper, we engage with the rising importance of journal ranking lists. We explore the pressure these place on marketing academics and the politics of knowledge production, stressing academic game-playing, careerism, and paradigmatic homogeneity. We appreciate that scholars are disciplined by these lists, their line-managers, and reaffirm list power through their own patterns of self-management. Nonetheless, marketing academics should avoid making the naïve assumption that the appearance of a paper in a highly rated journal necessarily serves as a proxy for ‘quality’. Publication in a particular outlet does not transform the ultimate contribution being made in any substantive fashion. We provide an extensive critique of the function and impact of journal lists. However, it is also recognised that these are very important for members of the marketing community. As such, we explain our reasons for contesting the recent re-grading of the *Journal of Marketing Management* by a prominent journal list and underline the changes that have been made to the *Journal* since the beginning of the current editorial term. Finally, the support of prominent scholars among our thought community for the policies being implemented is highlighted and we underscore the rigour of contributions to the *Journal*, the review process, the rising citations, downloads and truly global readership of the *JMM*.

Keywords: Academic career; stress; anxiety; journal ranking lists; ABS

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‘Within our tenured security, we nevertheless find it impossible not to give in to anxieties about our less-than-starspangled publication record... We feel the strain of upcoming research audits, and imagine our dean’s heavy breath down our necks for more, more, more, four star publications. And we relish it, choking ourselves on long working hours, vicarious gossip and obsessive panic-fits over reviewer comments as we slowly move to another rank(ed) climax’

(Cederström & Hoedemaekers, 2012, p. 232)

Introduction

Knowledge production has always had a non-individualistic edge (Oswick & Hanlon, 2009). Major patrons and supporters have historically played an influential role in enabling and constraining academic and artistic activities. It is about time we fully appreciated this in terms of the academic labour we undertake, the scholarship we produce, and our contributions to the world. Our behaviour as marketing academics is fundamentally shaped by contextual and interactional factors that literally are the conditions of possibility for what we do (Tadajewski, 2016). The literature we read, the peers we consult, the librarians who help us, the secretaries who organise our academic work-lives, and the students who inspire or demand greater clarity, all contribute to what we eventually publish. The production of knowledge is a truly social activity (Bradshaw & Brown, 2008).

We are all exposed to the politics of the institutional networks in which we operate. This is true all the way down the academic food chain. From Deans tasked with improving research credibility and rankings through to journal editors working in a climate of accountability, the structures surrounding knowledge production and certification are all too obvious and sometimes deeply detrimental (Prichard & Willmott, 1997). This politics is supported by the surrounding intellectual and material scaffolding, the vision guiding the universities we inhabit, the departments we work in, the colleagues whose judgment affects whether we are hired or not or whether we get tenure (Ferris, Ketchen, & Buckley, 2008). Politics of one kind or another influences our institutional status and self-concept (Parker & Thomas, 2011).

Working as an academic, while frequently fascinating, fun and frustrating by turns, is not an easy job. It is characterised by considerable levels of stress, long hours, a great deal of ambiguity and substantial self-discipline (Clarke, Knights, & Jarvis, 2012). Not only is intellectual labour demanded, it is increasingly intensified. As one senior lecturer remarked recently, ‘you have to be excellent at everything...you need to be fucking amazing’ (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p. 342). This means that some university environments are marked by pronounced competitive relations between individual colleagues, with collegiality and social interaction falling by the wayside (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004).

An important element of work intensification relates to the publication demands we face. These can be truly formidable. Scholars are tasked with producing numerous publications over specific periods of time. The end result is not tenure or long-term job security. It is on-going stress, punctuated by academic highs when we meet our targets and lows when we don’t (Gabriel, 2010). Academic identities are very fragile accomplishments (Humphreys, 2005). They need affirmation and one of ways of doing so is through our publication activities. But this is a difficult way of seeking affirmation, only liable to lead to feelings of warmth and satisfaction for the high performing few. The pages that form the gold standard in terms of academic publication are strictly limited (Clarke et al., 2012); rejection rates are skyrocketing, yet the pressure remains to achieve standards – the elusive ‘four by four’ in the UK system – that only very few people can logically ever satisfy (Harding, Ford,

& Gough, 2010). Nonetheless, this remains an unattainable ideal that fosters self-discipline, exploitation and renders us more manageable (e.g. Harding et al., 2010; Keenoy, 2005).

The production of journal ranking lists feed into all these stresses, strains and occasional euphoric moments. They have had a presence on the scene for a while now, influencing where people send their work, what types of contributions they write, and how they value outlets and the people who write for them (Sangster, 2015). The lists are notoriously contingent unless, that is, your preferred publication conduit of choice is one of the standard four or five that routinely perch on high. We should not, however, think that research and teaching audits are new. They have a history, with those of emeritus status or long dead having faced related, if not exactly the same, pressures during their careers (Oswick & Hanlon, 2009).

Academics have long engaged in competition with their peers, seeking to promote their own contributions above those of others within their specialism (Macdonald & Kam, 2007). Prominent scholars that could forward our discipline in the wake of the Ford and Carnegie reports in the 1950s were identified for grants, awarded protected research time, reduced teaching schedules and able to secure appropriate training to advance their publications and scholarly standing (de Rond & Miller, 2005; Tadajewski, 2006). The point of difference now is that the positive incentives to produce certain kinds of knowledge have diffused more widely, leading more people to engage in particular patterns of research behaviour, which can lead to substantial career rewards. There is also the flip-side: increased administrative loads for less 'productive' academics, as well as the ever present spectre of formalised disciplinary procedures for those not responding appropriately to the 'attention' they are given by research directors.

While we will explore some of the problems that accompany journal ranking systems below, our concern is with the extent to which rankings now outweigh scholarly judgment when it comes to determining the merit of any given publication. This is deeply disconcerting as these metrics tell us absolutely nothing about the quality of a specific manuscript. Clearly all journal lists raise questions about their production and the judgment calls that help constitute them, but even more problematic is the fact that multiple journal lists are rapidly being subsumed by one in particular that seeks to provide the 'one best way' of adjudicating about 'quality' in academic knowledge production (Mingers & Willmott, 2013). The exemplar here is the list produced by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS). This differentiates the 'quality' of academic journals on the basis of a 1* to 4* ranking², with 4* reflecting the most prestigious outlets; 3* signalling very high quality journals with rigorous review procedures which publish original, thought provoking and important work and so on down the scale. This list disciplines the activities of many – although not all – members of the business school community (Parker, 2014).

The rise and fall of journal rankings in these lists is a not very subtle way of encouraging scholars to pursue research that fits with the intellectual landscape painted by the lists themselves. This is compounded by the overt pressures placed upon academics by 'list fetishists' (Willmott, 2011). We can all potentially fall into this category. This might be a function of our roles as department chairs, mentors or because our career success hinges on

² The 2015 version of the CABS list contains a 4* 'Journal of Distinction' category. This includes outlets that are widely viewed as the cream of the crop in a given discipline (e.g. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research* and *Marketing Science*).

playing the publication game set by the standards adopted by high placed outlets. These lists encourage all of us – publishers, editors and the people submitting to journals – to feel anxious about what we do (Cederström & Hoedemaekers, 2012; Gabriel, 2010). If we let them, journal lists can sculpt the positioning of our publication outlets, the direction of our discipline and our academic selves. Cumulatively, this is not healthy.

Our success in any respect is ephemeral. We might have scored well on the last research assessment exercise, but what about the next? And the one after that? Identity production and the constitution of self as academic has more than a subtle resemblance to a treadmill. You are only as good as your most recent publications or those in the pipeline (Clarke et al., 2012). This is not necessarily all bad. It can be beneficial to some people, pushing them to strive harder to achieve their career goals. They may be greatly stimulated by the task, enjoying the intellectual problem solving that publication requires. The rewards are obvious. Publications provide personal mobility; mobility creates the opportunity for further remuneration, the ability to negotiate preferential research conditions, and the freedom to think.

Whatever way people approach their academic labour, it is apparent that they do not make these decisions in the absence of a variety of pressures, stresses and demands. Increasingly, these pressures come from fairly new sources such as the CABS ranking list which is utilised by enough senior staff in the United Kingdom in positions of power that it particularly deserves our attention. No doubt, those in other institutional contexts face similar tenure oriented pressures that are commensurate. Despite this, in this paper, we will focus on the UK context for the sake of narrative clarity.

The Politics of Knowledge

Recently concerns have been articulated about the ‘Americanization’ of management and marketing research (Gabriel, 2010; Lee, 2011; Özkazanç-Pan, 2012), a process which is exacerbated by the production of journal lists (Mingers & Willmott, 2013; Willmott, 2011). In the case of marketing and consumer research, ‘American’ stands in for ‘world standard’. Pursuing one type of research which is accorded the status of highly significant contributions to knowledge and rewarded disproportionately is not really doing anything ‘world leading’ or even vaguely international. It is usually parochial and the export of parochial orientations does not increase our contribution to scholarship, it decreases it, reducing its vitality. Let us explore what this means in more specific terms. The politics of knowledge production in our discipline, like many others, encourages people to pursue fairly mainstream research and avoid excessive deviation from received norms (McDonagh, 1995). This means that unusual paradigmatic choices and innovative methodologies are eschewed for topics and research strategies that can demonstrate their contribution to a cumulative body of scholarship (e.g. Silk, 1993; Sivadas & Johnson, 2005).

Securing access to ‘top’ ranking marketing journals is helped by adopting a positivistic research strategy (Hirschman, 1993; Mingers & Willmott, 2013; Stewart, 2002), articulating a commitment to naïve falsificationism (e.g. MacInnis, 2005) and by having a North American on the paper (Svensson, 2005; Svensson & Wood, 2006). Taking a quantitative approach is highly desirable (Lehmann et al., 2011; Polonsky, 2008; Svensson, 2006; Svensson & Wood, 2006). Qualitative research is substantially less desirable. Theoretical and conceptual work often has to scale considerable obstacles before publication and critiques of popular topics are likely to find negotiating the peer review system very difficult (Polonsky, 2008).

From an instrumental point of view, we are encouraged to pursue easily produced, quickly constructed, *quantitatively* oriented, and easy to roll out *empirical* projects (Littler & Tynan, 2005; Svensson & Wood, 2006). And, in some cases, the politics of knowledge production are literally supported through payments for publishing in specific outlets, with a veritable menu of prices available for each tier of publication. Macdonald and Kam (2007, p. 644) indicate that certain schools in France pay considerable sums for the right publication, as do institutions in Australia. The UK has its own form of payment in terms of the well paid positions available for those scoring appropriate – read mostly American – publications. So, the extent to which our top ranked journals reflect the international nature and paradigmatic variety of the discipline today is deeply dubious. We are not alone in stating these general arguments. They are not outliers (e.g. Brown, 2012; Lee, 2011). The pressures and biases are, even so, aggravated by journal ranking lists.

Journal Lists, Subjectivity and Paradigmatic Bias

Within business, management and marketing, there is considerable debate about the function and value of journal lists. Some people like them, especially those who perform well by their metrics, or who have to make hiring decisions. They provide a means to avoid protracted debates about the quality of a given stream of research. They are an ‘administrative short cut’ (Tourish & Willmott, 2015, p. 43) and a highly useful device for ‘ass covering’ when it comes to decisions about research productivity and promotion (Willmott, 2011, p. 438).

The overall contribution of these lists to academic practice is fairly unhealthy, bordering fetishistic. This is where the list is the object of scholarly attention and its claims about intellectual significance are prioritised (Willmott, 2011). We believe that they exacerbate the problems expressed above in relation to the valorisation of certain types of contribution since they accelerate the processes of Americanisation given that the majority of the highest ranking publications on these lists are published out of the U.S. (Gabriel, 2010; Willmott, 2011). Editorial boards are skewed in terms of U.S. membership and to secure publication, it helps if you are an American (e.g. Svensson & Wood, 2006); with U.S. scholarship published within elite circles often better cited than non-U.S. scholarship. This is part and parcel of the presence of ‘invisible colleges’ (Crane, 1972), ‘citation cartels’ (Willmott, 2011) and ‘institutionalised ignorance’ (Lee & Greenley, 2010) of research being conducted elsewhere on the planet.

List fetishism encourages the production of ‘technically well executed’ (Willmott, 2011, p. 434), incremental and conservative scholarship (Mingers & Willmott, 2013; Prasad, 2013; Tourish & Willmott, 2015). And we should be in no doubt about the structural ramifications of these lists in terms of academic practice. The case of a very well-known business school in the United Kingdom illuminates the extent to which ‘list fetishism’ can structure the production of knowledge. This institution is ‘notorious for aggressively recruiting’ researchers who regularly hit the top tier of journals as ranked by CABS (Tourish & Willmott, 2015, p. 39). Their senior staff have historically considered the list an important tool for managing research expectations and disciplining workers. As Parker (2014, p. 289) explains:

‘...the use of the UK [C]ABS list effectively produced forms of academic labour which were intended to satisfy the *single* criteria of publishing in journals which were on that list. The content of a piece was irrelevant, because all that mattered was the fact of ‘output’. Success at this strategy would mean money from the state, and more importantly in the long run, more money from students because EBS [European

Business School] would move up the league tables. Staff were useful insofar as they delivered on this criteria...[C]ABS success meant a high salary and promotion. [C]ABS failure meant entering a research management procedure involving very combative interviews with the Dean, and the eventual threat of dismissal...The new professoriate were very motivated and skilled at getting articles into certain journals, and nothing else seemed to matter, to them or EBS. This was performance based Taylorism, with academics as tradeable commodities based on the numbers of stars they had on their CV, so perhaps it should not surprise us that they might act in a self-interested manner. That is all that they were being expected to do.'

We should emphasise that the norms which structure academic publication are not deterministic. People develop all manner of 'elaborate ruses and devices' for negotiating evaluation measures (Prichard & Willmott, 1997, p. 296). There is room for resistance (Clarke et al., 2012; Parker, 2014). But it does seem that resistance is a high price that relatively few will pay. This is not unreasonable in itself. Trying to produce a paper that fits with research agendas that we do not naturally support can be an interesting challenge. Even those with highly charged political commitments act in ways consistent with the intellectual landscape that journal lists reaffirm (Mingers & Willmott, 2013). For example, critical management studies academics have actively played by the rules ossified by CABS and likeminded lists for various reasons (e.g. Butler & Spoelstra, 2012, 2014).

This said, it is worth highlighting still further the negative implications of these lists. They underscore that publications in English are the key conduits for knowledge dissemination, in spite of the contributions being made in other languages (Adler & Harzing, 2009). They depersonalise the production of knowledge at a fundamental level. We are no longer scholars engaged in the study of specific areas, but a bundle of publications which are used as a proxy to determine our worth as academics, irrespective of whether the material is half-way decent or not (Keenoy, 2005). Some commentators are very forthright about the content of the top tier of publications, arguing that they are barely worth reading (e.g. Butler & Spoelstra, 2014, p. 544; Cederström & Hoedemaekers, 2012, pp. 230-233), containing more than a little 'crap' (in Knights & Clarke, 2014). Some even assert that their own writing tailored for prestigious outlets is embarrassing and written to satisfy university demands for publication only (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014). However we parse it, the sole use of journal lists, citation scores and related tools are a flawed means of judging academic merit, and likely to lead to incorrect evaluations of intellectual contribution (Adler & Harzing, 2009).

To state the obvious, lists provide a small number of gatekeepers with a disproportionate amount of power over the shape of our discipline (Hussain, 2013; Sangster, 2015), channelling it in directions that are consistent with topics, theories, concepts, and methodologies most desirable in terms of current areas of interest and citations. Pushing up citation scores influences the impact factor of a journal. But what do these indicators really tell us? Not a great deal. They most likely reflect the influence of a few highly cited publications, but is this evidence of quality? Citation can, in some instances, be an indication that a paper is well regarded (Parker & Thomas, 2011). Equally, it might be evidence of utility rather than quality (Macdonald & Kam, 2007), suggesting ease of incorporation into established narratives, rather than research which challenges scholarship in new and novel directions. As such, when journal lists use citation metrics as their primary orientation device (Parker, 2014), they basically applaud scholarship that pursues topics central to disciplinary discourse which has a large number of people actively researching it, in fairly similar methodological terms (Willmott, 2011). This leads, once again, to a conservative bias in research (Adler & Harzing, 2009).

Also troubling is the fact that there are multiple ways in which impact factors and access to publication lists are being gamed by politically savvy journal editors (e.g. Adler & Harzing, 2009, p. 86). Özbilgin (2008, p. 117) describes conversations he has had with editors who actively encourage their editorial board to cite material published in ISI accredited outlets. Moreover, the publication policy of some journals apparently hinges on the willingness of authors to cite as much of the content of the journal published over the previous five years as possible (e.g. Parker & Thomas, 2011). This improves the impact factor, skewing the calculations Thomson ISI and related groups perform. Marketing publications are not immune from this criticism. As Macdonald and Kam point out with reference to a journal that has soared to the top of the CABS list recently, the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*: ‘Nearly 30 percent of citations in the *International Journal of Research in Marketing* are to papers in the *International Journal of Research in Marketing* or four others, according to a paper in the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*...seeking to demonstrate the quality of the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*’ (Macdonald & Kam, 2007, p. 648).

If systems work to reinforce certain kinds of practice, whether accidentally or not, then it is not unexpected that the above practices are frequently witnessed. There are ways of ameliorating some of these issues. Others are more troublesome, particularly those that relate to the calculation of the various factors used to inform the production of these lists, as well as the advice sought from subject specialists which is later ignored. The *Journal of Marketing Management* appears to have been very unlucky on multiple fronts in terms of the recent downgrading of the journal from 3* to 2* on the 2015 CABS list.

The JMM and CABS

We are fully aware of how important these lists are for our audience. For reasons that will be explicated, we have contested the CABS decision (We will place our data in the public domain in due course through a blog posting). Their initial response was brief and appeared not to have understood the nature of our query about their quantitative calculations. This did not sit comfortably with their espoused willingness to enter into dialogue with the various stakeholders affected by the list, although a follow up communication did receive a more considered response. However, they reiterated the point made in the list document itself that the list would be revised in three years and that any additional data will be used to inform subsequent decisions. Our engagement with CABS should in no way indicate that we fully support the ramifications of these lists or the uncritical valorisation of journal impact factors on scholarly activity (see Wilsdon et al., 2015). That much should already be clear. But our policy and feelings have to take account of the needs of our audience. It is apparent from conversations with those working at all levels of our discipline that these lists are a salient part of the ‘games of truth’ in which we all participate. They should thus merit our close attention.

When reading the introduction to the CABS list, the list editors strive to underline their commitment to the business school community. It is fair to say that a certain degree of instrumentalism undergirds their overall positioning. They maintain the function of the list is to help new scholars target appropriate journals for their research. This obviously has career ramifications. It may increase the chances of promotion within an institution or elsewhere. With the right – ‘top journal’ publications – people can shift university allegiances, especially if their path to promotion and prosperity are constricted at present. This seems reasonable. The attempt by CABS to maintain scholarly credibility is less convincing. In the first place, there is an element of confusion about what the list is meant to accomplish. As they write,

‘The Guide should be comprehensive in the coverage of research conducted in business schools internationally’ (CABS, 2015, p. 6). Equally, though, ‘The Guide is not intended to be a fully comprehensive one’ (CABS, 2015, p. 5). Still, quibbling aside, this is not the main issue with the list, far from it.

The list document clearly signals its understandable reluctance to rely on metrics. These have been widely critiqued and it makes perfect sense to move beyond them in preference for academic consultation (e.g. Wilsdon et al., 2015). As such, they supplement these measures through discussions with the scholarly community for each respective sub-discipline. The ‘Scientific Committee Members’, that is, the subject specialists whose advice and knowledge are an essential component in the drive beyond metrics had to ‘consult widely’ (CABS, 2015, p. 4); inform their judgments via ‘consultations with learned societies, professional associations and/or leading academics in their area’ (CABS, 2015, p. 8); buttressing this, the list producers ‘have endeavoured to engage more widely with expert peers and scholarly associations’ (CABS, 2015, p. 7).

Given the importance of these consultation processes, it would be expected that the Scientific Committee consulted all the respective groups in a given discipline, but the extent to which this actually occurred is very unclear. No evidence is provided of the rigorous methodological protocols that should have been implemented to ensure that inputs derived from this consultation strategy were reflective of the multiple intellectual communities that constitute any of our disciplinary specialisms. There is anecdotal evidence that the period given for consultation by those working within marketing was minimal, certainly not enough to generate the process of discussion and consultation by a paradigmatically varied community of scholars that should have informed this qualitative element of the list production process.

As interested parties to these discussions and decisions, we have probed CABS for further information on this matter. However, the transparency and objectivity of this process is, considering the desire of list managers to ‘provide a level playing field’ (CABS, 2015, p. 5) for scholars, remarkably underwhelming. They have not expanded upon the mechanics of the qualitative strategy they employed. The initial selection, paradigmatic affiliations and subsequent decision-making of those consulted consequently remains seriously opaque. They do not state how issues of paradigmatic bias are controlled (e.g. Tadjewski, 2008). This is particularly worrying from our perspective on multiple fronts. We encourage and publish contributions from across the spectrum of intellectual activity in marketing and consumer research (e.g. Cherrier & Gurrieri, 2014; Dall’Olmo Riley et al., 2015; Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2013; Eckhardt et al., 2015; Schuster, 2015). This means we are subject to potentially more critical evaluation(s) courtesy of paradigmatic bias than most, if not all, other outlets. Some of our submissions do not chime with those appreciated by the mainstream.

Obviously, we are not criticising the subject specialists offering their time and commitment to CABS. They perform a service for the discipline. Our concern is with the level of paradigmatic plurality featured in the dialogues CABS desired. If they are to truly represent our subject, then those evaluating our work have to possess first rate research credentials and they have to be receptive to the multiple perspectives being pursued within our respective thought communities (Sangster, 2015). Even so, they cannot be expected to comprehend the intellectual weight of the entire discipline within a short time-frame. There should be systematic consultation with academics aligned with logical empiricism and managerial research, Interpretive Consumer Research and CCT, Critical Marketing Studies

and the multiple streams of thought that constitute our public policy oriented arm. After all, there are intellectual justice issues involved here. It is unreasonable to expect scholars trained in one area, with their own distinct interests, to assess contributions from all other paradigms. We do not need to rehearse the debates around paradigm incommensurability or the sociology, psychology and philosophy of science: a close reading of the marketing and consumer research literature indicates that inter-paradigmatic judgment and evaluation problems still confront us.

In any case, acknowledgement of the requirement to read the content published in the journals they are passing judgment upon and some indication of the extent of engagement with the literature would have been deeply desirable. Similarly, reference to sampling procedures is a base level expectation for a list trying to convince an already sceptical audience of its merits. The CABS response received by our editorial office that discussion of the qualitative element of their decision-making process was ‘clearly explained in the methodology section of the Guide’ (personal communication) is not consistent with the content in the CABS guide nor with the level of detail that should be provided to justify, legitimate and persuade their target audience of the validity of their procedures.

We would be remiss in failing to acknowledge that the CABS list producers are very aware that this process was not flawless; that the dialogue they stimulated with subject specialists did not lead to the comments of specialists necessarily carrying due weight if it potentially affected the way the list might be viewed by those most likely to invoke its findings, namely, senior staff tasked with hiring, promotion and related decisions. They register that there is a tendency for journal rankings to avoid downgrading outlets. The ultimate result was that scholarly guidance from specialists was sometimes ignored. It was the non-specialist decisions made by the editors that carried more weight, with concern for the application of the journal list being a priority:

‘...new ratings were then sent to the subject specialists for comment. A further round of discussions was entered into until agreement was reached for each subject area. The outcome reflected the Editors’ view of what appeared a “fair” outcome *while preserving the credibility of the Guide*...[otherwise] *there is a risk that schools would not adopt the Guide and rely on their own methods.*’

(CABS, 2015, p. 8; emphasis added)

The idea that a ‘fair’ decision can be made by non-specialists who have decided to treat specialist opinion as not credible is not consistent with the ethos of using these groups to overcome the limitations of metrics. At worst, it is a legitimisation method that shades into perpetuating an ideological position that is not willing to admit alternatives to its own views and values for the term of its coronation.

The issues that have potentially affected the standing of the *JMM* in this list are not limited to paradigmatic bias and editorial perfidy. The metric based judgments are a further cause for concern. We have already referred to our reservations about the failure of CABS to initially register that our own quantitative analyses have raised questions about the completeness of the citation data used to assess the *JMM*. Further correspondence with CABS elicited the response that “Incomplete data is not by definition inaccurate, it is just imperfect” (personal communication). Our concern is that an appropriate methodology should have addressed these issues at the outset of the process. There are other issues with the use of metric data. Any citation analysis is, by necessity, a backwards-looking exercise. For this list, published in 2015, the actual articles that citations were counted for were published in the

period 2003-2011 (CABS, 2015, p.10). This lack of recency in the metric data is a worry, particularly as this list is intended to be valid until 2018, when the next list is due to be released.

Furthermore, for a number of years, the *JMM* has been steadily increasing the number of issues we publish. This expansion policy was undertaken because we were receiving a great deal of very high quality work that deserved publication far quicker than we could process it at the time. As such, in 2013 the *Journal* moved from 14 to 16 issues per year. In 2014 it increased further to 18 issues per year. This growth influences citation calculations. Our citation scores are dampened not only due to the increase in volume being published, but as a function of citations in the social sciences taking a greater period to gather steam than is the case in the natural sciences.

Since the number of issues being published has now stabilised and there will be a flow of citations to this material, it is highly likely that our citation metrics will increase accordingly going forward. Moreover, when the performance of the *Journal* is examined through the multiple international journal ranking systems available – including VHB 2015, CNRS 2014, the Australian Business Deans Council list 2013 or Fneg 2013 – we rank alongside very high performing 3* outlets.

Certainly, our peer review evaluation process is second to none. We receive a very high volume of submissions. Currently we receive around 450 submissions per year, with over 90% of the standard content received being rejected after evaluation by the editors (the desk rejection rate is 59.8%). If content does negotiate initial editorial evaluation, it is examined by an Associate Editor who is a subject specialist. If the Associate Editor feels the manuscript deserves further attention by the intellectual community, only then is it passed to three reviewers, all of whom will be specialists in a given paradigmatic, theoretical, conceptual or methodological tradition. The overwhelming majority of papers will undergo multiple rounds of review, with the acceptance rate for those producing suitably scholarly material being 9.7%. Publishing in the *JMM* is therefore not easy. We have very high standards and we will uphold them. As the comments received from scholars situated across multiple paradigmatic communities that are reproduced below underscore, we have been very successful in this regard, improving the content, standing, pluralism and international status of the *Journal* during our tenure (e.g. Fang et al., 2014; Harju & Huovinen, 2015; Joy et al., 2015; Lawlor & Prothero, 2011; Levy, 2012; Piacentini et al., 2014; Varman & Belk, 2012).

The *JMM* is intended to reflect our entire thought community, not just a paradigmatic subsection³. This pluralism stands us in contrast to nearly all other marketing journals which cater to particular paradigmatic or thematic groups. Our task is to reflect the best the marketing academy has to offer. We provide space to those pursuing interesting, innovative, iconoclastic and contentious work. This can be managerial, interpretive or critical in orientation. The fact we are publishing some of the most interesting and paradigmatically varied work appearing in the marketing academy today is supported by those whose judgments we value, that is, scholars inside our disciplinary orbit.

As many UK marketing academics will appreciate, the *JMM* is one of the three main journals which constitute the majority of submissions being entered for our periodic state

³ Thus we have published or have forthcoming special issues on critical marketing, consumer vulnerability, branding, strategic social marketing, consumer decision-models, virtual worlds, and the multiple schools of thought in consumer psychology to name just a few.

level research assessment exercises. More content from the *JMM* was submitted in the whole Business and Management Unit of Assessment for the 2014 Research Excellence Framework than any other journal, with 200 outputs submitted (equal with the *British Journal of Management*), 68 submissions more than the next listed marketing journal. Since over 1000 papers were submitted by marketing scholars, with just under three quarters of this material judged ‘as either world-leading or internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour’ (see <http://www.ref.ac.uk/pubs/201401/>), the recent downgrading of the *JMM* merits further attention by the CABS community on, as we have indicated, multiple fronts.

To help inform the future decision-making activities of all our stakeholders, the *JMM* will be part of the initial tranche of outlets joining the Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI). This is a Thomson product that enables scholars to search their database to ‘get real-time insights into a journal’s citation performance while the content is considered for inclusion in other Web of Science collections’ (http://wokinfo.com/media/pdf/S024651_Flyer.pdf). This is part and parcel of the process we have commenced in relation to securing an Impact Factor for the *Journal*. We should add that the latter process takes a considerable amount of time and it is a process we never intended to rush, preferring to devote our energies to developing an appropriate positioning strategy and direction for the *Journal* whilst cultivating a pipeline of exceptionally high quality material for publication. We are secure that we have done so, indeed the intellectual pipeline of the *JMM* in terms of individual articles and special issues is very exciting, with the latter in place up to 2019.

In responding to the downgrading by CABS, in conjunction with a previous editor (Professor Michael Baker) we contacted numerous productive researchers to ask them to evaluate the performance of the *Journal* and whether they thought the downgrading was an accurate reflection of the content being published in the *JMM*. We received responses from scholars located in many different countries with varied research interests. Comments were forthcoming from senior level staff with prominent administrative roles within their institutions (e.g. Deans) and outside (e.g. 3 past Presidents of the European Marketing Academy, 2 past Presidents of the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy, and 2 former editors of the *Journal of Marketing*). Taken as a whole, the comments solicited represent some of the most active scholars writing today. Some of these comments are reproduced below, and we thank those who have kindly given us permission to include their remarks:

Professor John Sherry, Northwestern University

‘I’m saddened to learn of the journal’s downgrading in the increasingly dysfunctional tournament of value that institutions are escalating in their obsessive preoccupation with rankings. Our fixation on tiers to the exclusion of the evaluation of the quality of individual papers themselves has been decried by all of our scholarly associations, with seemingly little effect on gratuitous status-seeking. *JMM* has a truly ambitious vision, boasts an outstanding set of editors and board members, and has published articles by marketing luminaries from around the world. I can’t imagine why ranking agencies have seen fit to devalue its merit. This is just plainly a bad decision.’

Professor Sidney Levy, University of Arizona

‘I am writing to strongly protest the lowering of the ranking of the *Journal of Marketing Management*. This journal has been rising, not declining. I have been writing and publishing

in many journals of our field, including so-called top journals, and find my experience with *JMM* is one of the best. I know other prominent scholars agree with me. The editors are well-known and exemplary in their competence and quality of judgment. I do not understand your [CABS's] judgment in this instance, which I believe is mistaken, and hope you are open to reconsidering it.'

Professor Søren Askegaard, University of Southern Denmark

'I have been informed, that the ABS has downgraded the *Journal of Marketing Management* from a category 3 to category 2 journal. As a member of the editorial review board and as a long-term active part of the international research publication scene, with 6 years as Associate Editor at the *Journal of Consumer Research* (2008-2014) as my most impactful contribution, I must say that I am most surprised by this decision. When I consider the definitions of the respective categories, I do not have any doubt whatsoever that the description of a category 3 journal in terms of originality, execution, submission rates, referee process and good journal metrics are all descriptors of the current status of the *Journal of Marketing Management* within the field of marketing. I conclude that I do not see any objective or substantial arguments behind a downgrading. Furthermore, as I see it the *Journal of Marketing Management* is in the process of internationalizing both its audience and its contributors beyond the British scene, and a downgrading will be a severe impediment to this process and thereby to the international significance of British marketing research. I therefore sincerely hope, that the ABS will reconsider its decision.'

Professor Elizabeth Parsons, University of Liverpool (co-editor of *Marketing Theory*)

'It was with great concern that I heard that the *Journal of Marketing Management (JMM)* had been downgraded on the ABS list to two stars. I have published in a range of three and four star journals and the review experience I have had when submitting papers to *JMM* has certainly been as theoretically rigorous and demanding. I cite *JMM* papers regularly as they present original, cutting edge research; the special issues in particular set the tone and direction that the wider field is moving in. Throughout my 15 years as a marketing academic *JMM* has always been seen as the leading journal in the field amongst colleagues. My view is informed by experience on both sides of the fence (author and editor) as I am a longstanding editor for the journal, *Marketing Theory*, which enjoys a three star rating'.

Professor Pierre McDonagh, University of Bath

'I simply do not recognise or understand this downgrade as it is an insult to the continuing quality scholarship that has been published in the *Journal* since its inception...Over my career as an academic since 1987 I have always ranked the *JMM* as the top UK marketing Journal and encouraged my colleagues and doctoral students to publish their work there...It clearly meets the criteria for a 3 "publishing original and well executed research papers and are highly regarded. These journals typically have good submission rates and are very selective in what they publish. Papers are heavily refereed. Highly regarded journals generally have good to excellent journal metrics relative to others in their field" and has done since it was created and developed by the long list of prestigious editors from its inception to the present day. I have been delighted to publish a number of times in the Journal and so have many of the world's leading marketing scholars. I feel truly honoured recently to be invited to guest edit the *Journal* with a Special Issue on Sustainable Consumption, Activism,

Innovation & Brands, which attracted...submissions from all parts of the globe. I can also say having guest edited the *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, *Journal of Macromarketing* and *Journal of Marketing Management* that the administrative team and review process of the *Journal of Marketing Management* is superb and one could argue that the reviews I have seen are indeed on a par with some of the 4 ranked journals by the ABS. I would certainly like to see the ABS defend and justify their decision to downgrade ...I cannot really countenance this has been a well informed exercise if this decision has resulted from it...as the *JMM* back catalogue of articles represent a phenomenal resource with the marketing academy and [provide] an important counter balance to the hegemony of the US view on marketing and the marketplace’.

Professor Pauline Maclaran, Royal Holloway, University of London (co-editor of *Marketing Theory*)

‘There is no doubt in my mind that the *Journal of Marketing Management* meets all the criteria for a 3* ABS rated journal. I say this from my experience of having published in other 3* journals and as the editor of a 3* journal myself. *JMM* regularly publishes high quality research papers by internationally renowned scholars. In my view its quality has steadily improved over the last three years, with *JMM* now being regularly acknowledged by top international scholars as evidenced by recent citations in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (i.e. Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Thompson & Ustuner, 2015). *JMM*’s quality of scholarship is also reinforced by the international nature of its review board and AE [Associate Editor] system which further reflect the journal’s standing in that top scholars are willing to devote time to the *Journal*...The review process is extremely thorough with three double blind reviewer sets of comments and an AE overview of these. It should be noted that the introduction of a three reviewer system was made by the current editors and has greatly enhanced the journal’s quality in terms of feedback to authors and the resulting publishable research. Special issues of *JMM* are undertaken by a variety of leading international scholars and cover a wide range of intellectually stimulating material. Over the past three years, the quality of *JMM* has increased greatly. It is not credible to me, therefore, that the journal has been downgraded in the ABS list at this time when it has been going from strength to strength as regards high quality content and international recognition. The downgrading of *JMM* is also a severe blow to the Marketing Academy...This...will have a detrimental effect on our discipline, particularly in relation to other management subject areas.’

To reiterate, if journal ranking lists help constitute a research monoculture (Mingers & Willmott, 2011; Willmott, 2011); if they encourage mainstream research; if they partly structure the reading habits of marketing scholars (Gabriel, 2010); if they negatively affect teaching and the publication of material likely to interest practitioners (Parker, 2014) and do all this for a protracted period, then neither we, our students nor the communities beyond the ivory towers are being exposed to the intellectual vitality of our field and our practices will be the worse for it.

As was stated at the start of this paper, the decisions we make in our academic careers are not strictly speaking our own much of the time. Our academic selves are a nexus of structured ‘choice’ processes channelled by the institutional structure we inhabit, senior staff, our engagement with colleagues and a variety of other stakeholders, as well as our commitments outside of the academic labour process. Journal ranking systems are an important part of this texturing process. They do not, however, say much about the contribution of an individual piece of scholarship (Hussain, 2013). They make contingent claims about the quality of a journal outlet (Sangster, 2015). These may not reflect accurate

figures; they may be biased by paradigmatic commitments; and they may not reflect the knowledge of subject specialists whose identities are used as legitimization tools. We will endeavour to correct misconceptions of the *Journal* on behalf of a pluralistic marketing community. In the meantime, we will continue to watch the quality, readership levels and contributions made by the community of scholars submitting to the *JMM*, continue to rise.

Conclusion

Journal lists are influential factors that pattern academic behaviour. But they do not determine the contribution a piece of scholarship makes nor do they truly say anything about an individual piece of work. We nonetheless appreciate the significance journal ranking lists have for many people. Whatever benefits they may offer some gatekeepers and authors, they also come with serious costs in terms of their impact on scholarship.

We are not interested in playing the system in the multitude of ways that would probably increase our CABS ranking or other metrics. Conservative, mono-paradigmatic research does not represent what marketing scholarship is all about. We do not intend to gravitate towards an Americanised system of knowledge production and paradigmatic adherence. We reflect the marketing academy. It is for this reason that we have spent the last few years broadening the paradigmatic framing of the *Journal*. Paradigmatic pluralism needs to be nurtured. It is not just a given. As new paradigms, perspectives, theories and concepts appear, we will send them for evaluation by those best placed to determine their merit. We look forward to welcoming your contributions.

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